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ABSTRACT

A detailed study is reported of the linguistic adaptation of a white girl in a predominantly black school in Camden, New Jersey. The girl is a cultural heroine in the area, having earned the admiration of both blacks, and Puerto Ricans by her ability in fighting, dancing, talking, and dealing with the opposite sex. Subjective reaction tests show that most people hear her as black; whites hear some white influence, but black listeners hear nothing but black patterns. A detailed linguistic analysis shows that she has overshot the rules of the Black English Vernacular in five cases, and developed a special grammar of her own, but that this has not disturbed the effectiveness of her social adaptation. It is concluded that, in order to survive, the subject has nearly assumed the identity of the blacks in her environment. (Author/AMH)

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Environmental Effects on White Students in Black Schools

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Introduction

This paper was not conceived in an attempt to indict the public school system. With such notables as John Holt, Jonathan Kozol, and James Herndon the issue could hardly be improved upon.

Yet what this paper will deal with is the "Environmental Effects on White Students in Black Schools." The main emphasis will be on one particular white girl, discussing how well she adapts linguistically and culturally in this specific social setting. To a white child, however, whose world is entirely black--from the neighborhood environment to the school situation, one would be hard pressed to convince him that he was in the white majority, sociologically speaking.

The purpose of this paper then is to bring to light some of the problems encountered by white children in black schools, who, according to society, are in the majority, yet are suffering as any minority group child trapped in an environment full of dilemmas. More specifically, this will be an examination of their ways of adapting, in particular one child and the manner in which her speech habits are manifestations of the on-going struggle to cope with other people in an alien and often hostile atmosphere.

Setting and the Problem

The school (middle school in Camden) which is the primary concern of this paper is 98% Black, and 99% impoverished.

Amidst the atmosphere, there was one observable phenomenon worthy of note: the fact that little education seemed to be going on, and the fact that there was quite a bit of noticeable apathy on the part of teachers (Black and White). As a matter of fact, this school had been the subject of study a number of times in sociology and urban education. I wondered how the rare appearance of the White student among the ocean of Black faces was regarded. Had anyone really devoted time and study to their dilemma?

Much criticism of the public school system, more specifically, the inner city situation, has addressed itself to the problems surrounding the education of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other minority groups. Invariably and as a result of notoriety, euphemisms such as "culturally deprived," "culturally impoverished," "the underachiever," and the "exceptional child" have arisen and are now in vogue. However, beyond all euphemisms and popular slogans, are children whose situations have not as yet become a serious and widespread area of attention--the white child, not in an integrated school environment, but in an environment which is overwhelmingly Black. What does one call the white child in a school which is 98% Black--the forgotten child? Whatever term that is decided upon is as inconsequential as their plight is significant.

Hearing the following:

He <u>What you doin' girl</u>?

She Don't be hollerin' at me, man.

He Sit down and stop wolfin'.

She <u>You crazy</u>--up there talkin' about somebody doin' somethin' . . . don't make no sense.

(Class Go 'head girl.)

would not be significant in an inner city school with a 98% black population. No doubt such vignettes, at least to the teachers, have nearly become an everyday occurrence. Looking at the dialogue closely, it is evident that "What you doin' girl," and "You crazy" are examples of Black speech. What these two sentences show are the absence of the copula very evident in the grammatical patterns of Blacks. The fact that the "he" and "she" of the dialogue are a white teacher and a white pupil is significant since they have incorporated this characteristic into their everyday speech.

II The Social and Cultural History of Carla

The child's name is Carla. She is in the eighth grade, tall, with fair skin and dark hair, quite mature looking for 13. Carla is the oldest of nine children; she takes care of her family everyday after school. She is very popular, a characteristic that is very important to her. She has adapted especially well to her environment. Being one of the few white girls in a school predominantly black, she has achieved success. This is attributed to the fact that she socializes with Blacks all the time; in fact, she is very often considered Black.

On our first encounter (enroute to class) I asked her:

Q What sorts of dreams do you have?

A Like think about things.

Q Yes.

A Well like leavin' and goin' to Vocie (Vocational School) next year to be an electrician.

Q So you want to get out of this place.

A Sometimes cause there not nothin' happenin'.

Q You mean the other students.

A Yeah you know what goes down arcund here. And the teachers are the main ones boy.

The above conversation with regard to content is not particularly unusual. What eighth grader does not dream of entering high school? And what thirteen year old would not regard some of their teachers in a similar light? What is important, however, is the grammatical patterns. Her absence of the copula in "like think about things," and her usage of "there not

nothin' happenin'" were so similar to that of Blacks that the issue gave rise to other questions. Was this a conscious or an unconscious attempt to "fit in"? Was it done deliberately in order to survive, or had she been so exposed to Black language and more that she "was" Black?

Noticing that Carla's friends were for the most part Black, and seeing how popular she was among them, I questioned them. Asking her classmates Lwenia and Patricia about the reason for Carla's being so well liked, they responded:

> She like, one of the special white ones out in this school. She seem like she Black to me. She be walkin' around, she be with Black people not no White people most of the time. When she talks, like most White people they shy and everything 'cause they surrounded by Blacks, but Carla, she ain't shy or nothin.' Whatever she got to say she say it out in the open.

These characteristics obviously play an important role in Carla's acceptance by other Black students.

In hopes of getting some information on Carla's situation, I went to the guidance office, which, as I had anticipated, was not helpful. It was surprising how little pertinent information is contained in those folders--(name, address, name of parents, phone number, IQ and other test scores, past report cards, and schools previously attended.) After a cursory glance, it appeared that no answers to Carla's current condition were to be found. In order to illustrate the manner in which I did arrive at some conclusions regarding the white pupils interviewed, a small bit of historical background regarding this school and a certain elementary school would be entirely relevant

At its inception (in 1969) this particular middle school was begun with the intention of its being a racially balanced school. Surrounded on one side by a white neighborhood, and on the other by a Black community, the climate for such an experiment was favorable indeed. For whatever reasons, be they cultural, social, economic, or political, White parents of means, those who could afford it, removed their children in favor of a local parochial school. Thus, by the second year of operation, the school was almost entirely Black. And these few students, by whose presence prevent an entirely Black situation, turn up occasionally as little spots. It is important to note, that Carla attended K-5 in the neighborhood feeder school, which was almost exclusively White. This is noteworthy since many of the conclusions at which I arrived were based upon that very fact.

Going to the gym, I found Carla and a group of Black girls standing together. The comraderie existing between Carla and the group was unmistakeable as I would mention to her enroute to another class.

Q You seem to be pretty popular.

A Yeah, me and some of the kids are tight, 'specially Lwenia, Patricia and me. You know, we get along and who ain't like it, forget you. We alright.

Q You get along with most of your classmates, right?

A Shoot, who could do that. Nobody better not mess with me. Huh, I hook 'em up in a minute--I do hook 'em up hell.

Carla's use of "hook 'em up," and "forget you" are idioms used often by Blacks in this particular area. However, she uses

ain't for don't, which is even going beyond Black usage.[1] She is, in fact, creating her own grammar. Also, her sentences contain absence of the copula, as in "We alright." Carla, through her speech habits, now unconscious, has managed to achieve a quite tolerable situation for herself and a certain acceptability because of her apparent willingness to assimilate, and hence, become a part of the existing environment. Indeed, she had been in a few altercations, as she had indicated, but on the whole, she was succeeding.

Being quite amazed by these responses, I decided to go to the cafeteria to watch Carla in a less formal situation. Sitting only a few moments with her friends, one of the Black boys, Leroy, immediately came over to her and started a session in sounding:

He Hey, you is so ugly, Carla, it's pitiful.

She You ain't even good lookin' enough to meet a damn dog.

He I saw your mother in the welfare line.

She Knocked up your mom.

He Kiss my ass.

She Move your nose.

Carla's awareness of this ritual, called "sounding," indicates her awareness of an activity very popular among Black adolescents.[2] She not only understands the significance of the sounds, but is also well acquainted with the function of this activity, that is, being creative in her responses and being able to fit one sound into another. The fact that she can do this successfully is significant--there is a conscious effort to belong.

At the end of the day when Carla was about to leave I told her I would give her a ride home. The following was our conversation:

Q This is quite a walk every morning.

A I ain't hardly do it when it gets real cold, neither. I'ss just stay home and look at the stories and nix everything else. They must be crazy.

Q Who?

A Anybody. You know, expectin' somebody to walk a mile.

Home visitations were not so easy as I had initially anticipated. Since I had volunteered to drive Carla home (since she wasn't crazy and didn't want to walk home in the cold), I was invited in by Carla. Her use of ain't for didn't shows that Black and Whites share other uses of ain't; no white dialect uses ain't for did not.[3] Carla has incorporated this Black grammatical rule into her speech. Due to the fact that her mother worked, it was Carla's responsibility to pick her younger sister up at a neighbor's home and feed her. The housing projects were run-down with graffitti written on the sides of them, such as, "Junior n' Denise," "Soul Brother #1," "Do it till you satisfied." Into this environment Carla walked every day after school. What impressed me most was the frequency with which other Black children entered and left her house. One such youngster, whom Carla referred to as Cyrus, was up and down the steps and in and out of the door so often that Carla became annoyed and yelled, "What's wrong wi'cha nigger. You crazy. I'mo tell tell your mom, watch." Carla's conversation with me at home

showed many features of Black English Vernacular (BEV).[4]

Q What do you do after feeding your sister?

A I ain't hardly do nothin'.

Q What sorts of games do you play after school?

A I play tonk, pinochle, pitti-pat, and sometimes whist.

Q Then what do you do with the rest of your time, watch television?

A Yup, or jus' mess around.

Q Is your sister hard to watch?

A Not when she good.

What proves significant here is Carla's knowledge of card games played exclusively by Blacks. Although she did not volunteer the information about the games on her own, in a previous conversation, when asked about them, she said she often played them. Again, her use of ain't for didn't in "I ain't hardly . . .," and her absence of the copula in "she good" indicated that she has achieved Black grammatical features in her speech.

In Carla's neighborhood, I met a few of her friends who stopped to talk. The neighborhood has not only Blacks but Puerto Ricans as well. After talking to them about gang fights, I moved the conversation to a friendlier tone:

Q Who rules around here, boys or girls?

A What you mean man, the boys of course.

Q How well do you get along with Carla?

A Like her alot. She save us from the cops and she got a good figur' too.

Carla has apparently been quite successful in projecting an image that is not only appealing to Blacks, but to Puerto

Ricans as well. They like her looks and the fact that she will protect them from the police. For these reasons, she is special to them.

In order to see how Carla got along with Black boys, I went to a dance held in the gym. She arrived with a group of girls, some White, and immediately took control of the situation. She danced with several Black boys, no one in particular. The other White girls merely danced with each other. When asked about their feelings about this situation, they said they felt more comfortable dancing together, that they had little interest in dancing with Black boys. It should also be noted that no White boys appeared. Carla left the dance with Black students, not any one in particular. Talking to her afterwards, I asked:

Q Did you go home with any one particular boy, Carla?

A I ain't never gone with any one guy from here.

Q Why?

A Their girlfriends, they git'hot about it. Besides, those guys ain't want me for their old lady.

Q Is there anyone boy you might be interested in?

A No, these guys too young, my boyfriend, he 21.

Q Do you go out much?

A We go the disco, but he don't like the way I look at other guys.

Carla makes it quite clear that she is not interested in upsetting her friends by going out with the Black boys, yet she is most willing to be friends and dance with whoever asks her.

Again, Carla's way of knowing what is acceptable and unacceptable in Black culture: she is clever enough to realize that Black girls do not approve of White girls going with their boyfriends, and also aware of the fact that Black boys are interested in being with her, but surely not viewing her as a girlfriend.

In hopes of getting a better understanding of Carla's background, I had an interview with Carla's mother. It was very clear that Carla and her mother had a great deal of hostility toward one another because Carla felt her mother preferred the younger children, while her mother believed she showed no partiality. It should be noted that there were no traces of Black English Vernacular in the mother's voice, either intonational or grammatical. The conversation went as follows:

Mother	I treat all my children the same.
Carla	No you don't . . . You favor the young ones.
Q	Where were you born?
Mother	I lived in South Camden all my life.
Carla	No you ain't . . . You was born and breded in North Camden.
Q	Is Carla very helpful to you?
Mother	Carla is a help sometimes.
Carla	Sometimes, I'm home 24 hours a day.
Mother	You try to be out on the streets as much as you can.
Carla	Huh, I'm not even allowed to go out the front door without git' in the house.

Mother That's right. I don't want you running the streets like the rest of these tramps I see running around here.

Carla But I'm not a tramp and neither are my so-called friends.

It is very noticeable in the discourse that Carla has reduced her use of Black marked features. For example, the usual occurrence of ain't for didn't, and the absence of the copula do not appear. Also, her use of I'm not for I ain't is in the direction of White speech. It is important to see that when talking with her mother formally, who highly disapproves of Carla and her way of life, Carla's use of the marked features of Black English Vernacular are seldom used.

This being the case, I decided to talk with Carla in a formal situation to see whether or not she would use Black speech with me. She did in fact; Black English Vernacular was present throughout.

Q Do you have any trouble in this school?

A Well, I knifed two girls. They ain't like me hangin' with girls from North Camden.

Q What exactly happened?

A My friends and me be walkin' down the street when another girl come and one say to me, "Look at that White girl over there standin' with all them niggers. She insultin' my friends as well as myself. So I told her about herself. We got into a big fight and one of her friends passed her a knife and instead of usin' it she bluffed on me. But when I knocked the knife out'a her hand, I got it and I used it. I ain't bluff on her.

First of all, it is obvious that Carla is not afraid of fighting; she does what is required to survive in her environment. Her frequent use of ain't for didn't in such examples as "They ain't like me," and her absence of the third singular

in "one say to me" show the influence of BEV in her speech. Also the sentences, "I told her about herself," and "she bluffed on me" are idioms often used by Blacks in this area. It is important to point out that Carla does not imitate Black speech, but rather uses it naturally as a means of being accepted in the Black community.

Carla became sad when she spoke about her mother, her real mother, that is. Using the features of Black Vernacular she said: "I ain't never really knowed her, but I wish I had. She pretty from pictures that I seen of her. She ain't come to see me since I was a little child. She act like she don't like me." Interviewing Carla I often got the impression that she was strong and tough and very little bothered her, but for the first time I saw her sensitive side.

III Carla's Contrast with Other Students

Although Carla has been successful in adapting to her environment, it is important to consider other students who have not approached the situation in the same way.

Cherri, age 12, was the second child interviewed. Unlile Carla who was very physically mature, and who said how the "brothers were always diggin' on her figure," Cherri still looks like a young child in appearance. It was difficult to interview Cherri because she did not speak much.

Guidance records revealed that she was a stutterer. It is not easy to define stuttering - not unlike trying to define smiling or smirking. The difficulty perhaps, is due to the fact that each person has his own unique mannerisms of emotional expression and one must know the "smiler," the "smirker," and in this particular case, the "stutterer." Obviously, I was at a distinct disadvantage. When asked the following questions:

Q Do you like school, tell me about it.

Q Do you belong to any clubs?

She simply responded "no."

When asked why or when, or asked a question which demanded more than a negative or positive response, she merely shrugged her shoulders, eyes downcast. It is known that stuttering is very often hysterical. It may be an unconscious imitation of the speech of stutterers as a mechanism for gaining attention, sympathy, immunity from work assignments, or other primitive advantages. Though these persons stutter, they are not

stutterers; and consequently, not individuals whose stuttering is related to, and significantly a part of, stuttering as a condition or syndrome. And it is to the former category that Cherri, after examining records, visiting the home, and observing behavior, belongs. After our first meeting I was of the opinion that continuing with Cherri would not serve my purposes. I am not a speech pathologist and consequently saw no possibility of determining whether Cherri's speech habits were the result of her exposure to a culture and way of life alien to her own (as was my purpose) or whether other psychological and neurological factors came into play.

Contained within Cherri's folder, among the usual documents, was a note from Cherri's sixth grade teacher(she attended this school since grade 6) to her mother requesting a meeting to determine what was to be done about Cherri's "stammering in class." The reply, from the parent was interesting, she was unaware of the fact that her daughter had any sort of speech impediment whatsoever suggesting that perhaps some sort of mistake had been made. It was also indicated in the files, through teacher notation, that after a series of incidents involving Cherri and other students subjecting her to ridicule, the child had all but abandoned any attempst to communicate with other students.

I observed her standing by herself in the gym not engaging in any activities, and sitting completely alone in the cafeteria at lunchtime. Asking Carla about Cherri she said, "...the kids don't mess with her because she's crazy." It

would not be entirely hypothetical to imply that Cherri (as is the case with Carla) has unconsciously a speech habit (stuttering) to relieve a tense situation. While Carla has chosen (whether she is aware of the fact or not) to adopt the "When in Rome..." attitude, Cherri perceived an escape by being so different as to be considered "crazy" and "afflicted." The fact that her own mother had not noticed any peculiarities in her language behavior can have multiple interpretations ranging from repression of the reality of it due to embarrassment or the startling fact that what the mother has said was absolutely true. What is significant, however, is the fact that Cherri, according to her records did not stutter in grade five while attending an all white school. And, it would not be exaggeration to imply that her stuttering and her retreat into silence are due for the most part to an inability to establish her identity in an atmosphere devoid of whiteness. At any rate, Carla and Cherri, are making it in the short run. They are able to spend an entire school day virtually unscathed.

Such has nvever been the case for Gerry, age 16. Gerry, as I was told by a few teachers is one of the most feared boys in the school.. How a white boy could inspire such awe in black students amazed me initially. Because of time, I was unable to interview Gerry for an extended period. What I gathered from his records, and from the guidance counselor (who informed me of his open prejudice towards the other students and of his willingness to wage war on all those who tried to enforce their mores and culture on him) was that he

was apparently white in appearance and demeanor (long hair, bell bottoms etc.) and that the contrast between he and Carla' bordered on the unbelievable. In the short conversation that ensued, Gerry perceived every question from the standpoint of Black and White relationships. I was surprised at the ease with which the terms "nigger" and "blackie" were used. There were no traces of Black English to be discerned from his speech patterns. Gerry, as I learned from his homeroom teacher, lived in a small section of the city known as "Polack town." Although most have departed to the suburbs, Gerry and his family (and some others) still remain. All of Gerry's block is White and he had managed to assemble a gang of considerable proportion in an attempt as he puts it "to keep the Blacks from taking over." I noticed thaat Gerry's vocabulary pattern, aside from racial disparagments consisted mainly in the use of terms indiginous to white adolescents such as "groovy," "neat," "rally cool"etc. Similarly he exressed an interest in the music of John Denver, Eric Clapton and others. It seemed that Gerry did all in his power, most often resorting to violence, to maintain his own cultural identity through the assertion of his "White" language and background, while negating the cultural traditions of the "rug-heads" as he once referred to the Black students.

IV How It Is Done Linguistically - The Syntax

After looking at the cultural effects of this particular situation, it will obviously prove helpful to look at the structural effects of language on Carla thus getting a quantitative conclusion. The use of linguistic variables adds an important approach to the examination of speech differences, namely the quantitative measurement of the differences between the variants of a variable. Labov notes:

> Whereas the linguistic variant is a particular item--a morph or a phone--the variable is a class of variants which are ordered along a continuous dimension and whose position is determined by an independent linguistic or extra-linguistic variable."[5]

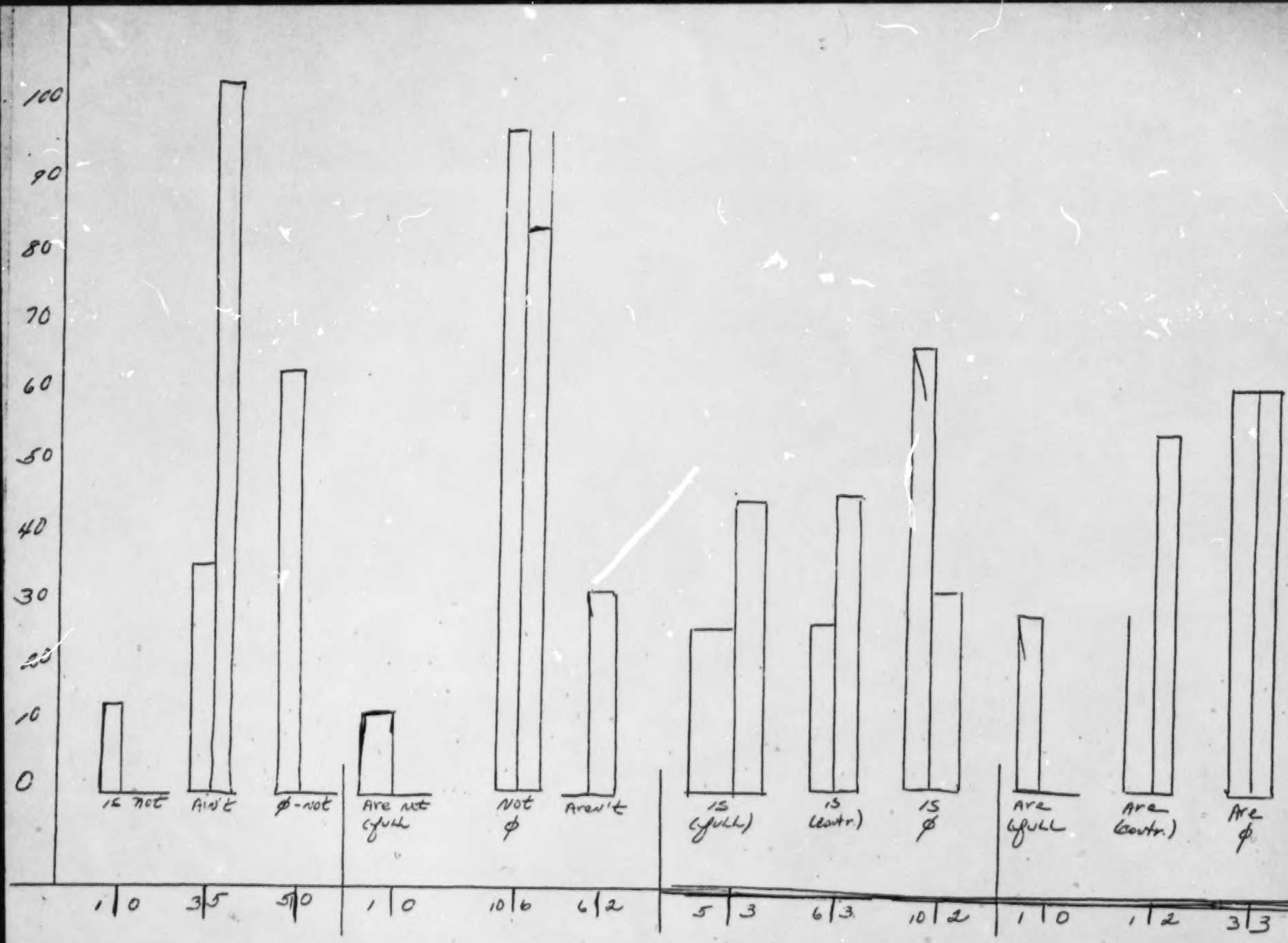
In the use of quantitative methods, parallels between linguistic and social patterns emerge. Thus a qualitative approach may be used in describing Carla's language, whereas, a quantitative model is needed for the patterned variation between forms.

Measuring the frequency of variants in Carla's speech was informative. It is said that, "Even the simplest type of counting raised a number of subtle and difficult problems. The final decision as to what to count is actually the final solution to the problem at hand."[6] Having discussed the linguistic variable, I will point out where it applies in my study.

Looking at Table I, there is an illustration of the positive and negative features of Carla's speech. The specific examples dealt with are :

is and not

A well known characteristic of Black speakers as well as



CARLA's Speech - TABLE I

others is the use of ain't for isn't which Carla used 5 times or 100% of the time in casual speech; this suggests an over-reaction since Black frequency is only about 50% of the time. Also used frequently was the zero copula. This particular form was used 5 times or 55% of the time in her formal speech. She often used sentences such as :

"She not goin' to the dance."

The absence of the copula be is a well known characteristic of Black speech, but not used as frequently as Carla uses it.

Another variable used in Black dialect and found in Carla's speaking was the use of are and not. In this case as in the former, Carla shows a high amount of frequency of the zero copula, namely 10 times or 91% in formal speech, and 6 times or 75% of the time in casual speech. She has obviously been quite successful in incorporating this variant in her style of speech.

The use of is and are were also replaced in both cases by the zero copula 17 times or 60% of the time in formal usage. Labov says in his study of New York City that "wherever Southern English can contract, Black English Vernacular can delete is and are."[7] Carla does precisely that, she deletes is and are the majority of the time.

In these style shifts, Carla shows a grammar all her own. Whereas Blacks use the contracted or deleted form, Carla makes constant use of the zero copula as a formal variant. Therefore, her grammar goes beyond the grammar of Black English Vernacular.

Looking at Table II, the marked Black features of using ain't for didn't are illustrated. In regard to this variant did and not, ain't was used three times as much as didn't. Labov states that "Black English Vernacular departs from White Non-Standard English in that in the negative ain't is used for didn't."[8] An example used by Labov in illustrating this point was with the Black gang, the Cobras:

223 "I ain't git but a little bit."[9]

similar to Carla's usage of:

"She ain't know I knifed the other two girls."

Even though Carla is White, she uses the markded features of Black English Vernacular.

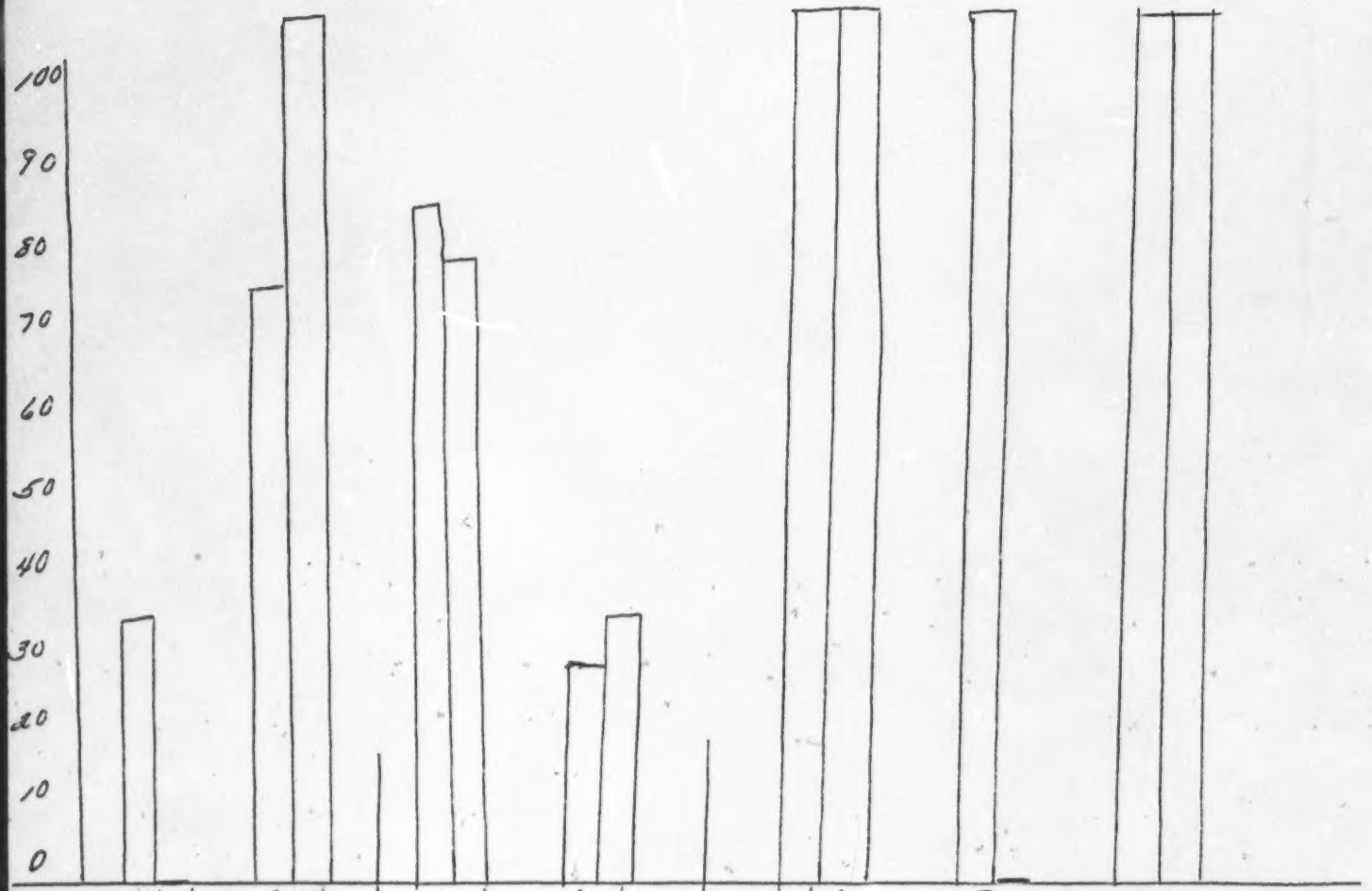
In the variable do and not the approach is quite different. In both formal and casual speech, Carla uses don't 48 times or 75% of the time. This feature is typical of both Black and White dialect, however, what is not typical is her use of ain't for don't. Blacks do not use this variant, they always use the contracted form don't. Carla uses ain't 5 times in both formal and casual speech. The following are her examples:

Formal: It ain't all be her problem.
It ain't all be up to him.

Casual: We ain't like bein' here today.
Who ain't like it, forget you. (two times)

Again, she is using a grammar all her own. And even though it is socially effected and goes beyond the grammar of Black English Vernacular, it is still acceptable to Black speakers.

And lastly, it can be seen that had, do and was were present



25 2|0 0|1 10|18 2|3 1|1 3|0 0|3

Total Tokens 89

in Carla's speech, but the number of tokens were very small, i.e. one to three tokens for each. Therefore, it may be shown that these three verbs used only a few times in her speech are parallel to the speech of Blacks who also use these terms infrequently, if at all.

V The Family Background Test

In order to prove that Carla has assimilated the Black English Vernacular of the students surrounding her, I played a sample of her speech and asked forty informants four questions about what they had heard. The sample went as follows:

All of a sudden out of the back alley she come runnin! She caught you know, and they mess her up. But if it wearn't for me, she wouldn't be livin'. I called them off. O Lord, they slaughterin' that child! They gone at her all of them. Everybody had to get her. I tired of all that, and say aye OK, everybody leave her alone. So I had to get Coco. He a big guy - got muscles you know. He big, really built.

Looking at this sample, it is obvious that there are five instances of absence of the copula(underlined), typical of Black speech. Also, the intonation in her voice influenced the informant's answers. After playing the tape, the following questions were asked:

1. Where in Philadelphia do you think this person was raised?
   no idea West Phila. North Phila.
2. How much white speech has she been exposed to?
   a great deal minimum none
3. Do you think she had contact with the South or Puerto Ricans?
4. Could she pass for white speaking this way?

The first series of questions assume that the speaker is in fact Black. Forty informants were asked for their reaction. Of this number, 36 were Black. They were divided into middle class university students, and lower class workers. The 4 white informants were middle class students at a college.[10]

In regard to question number one, the answers read as

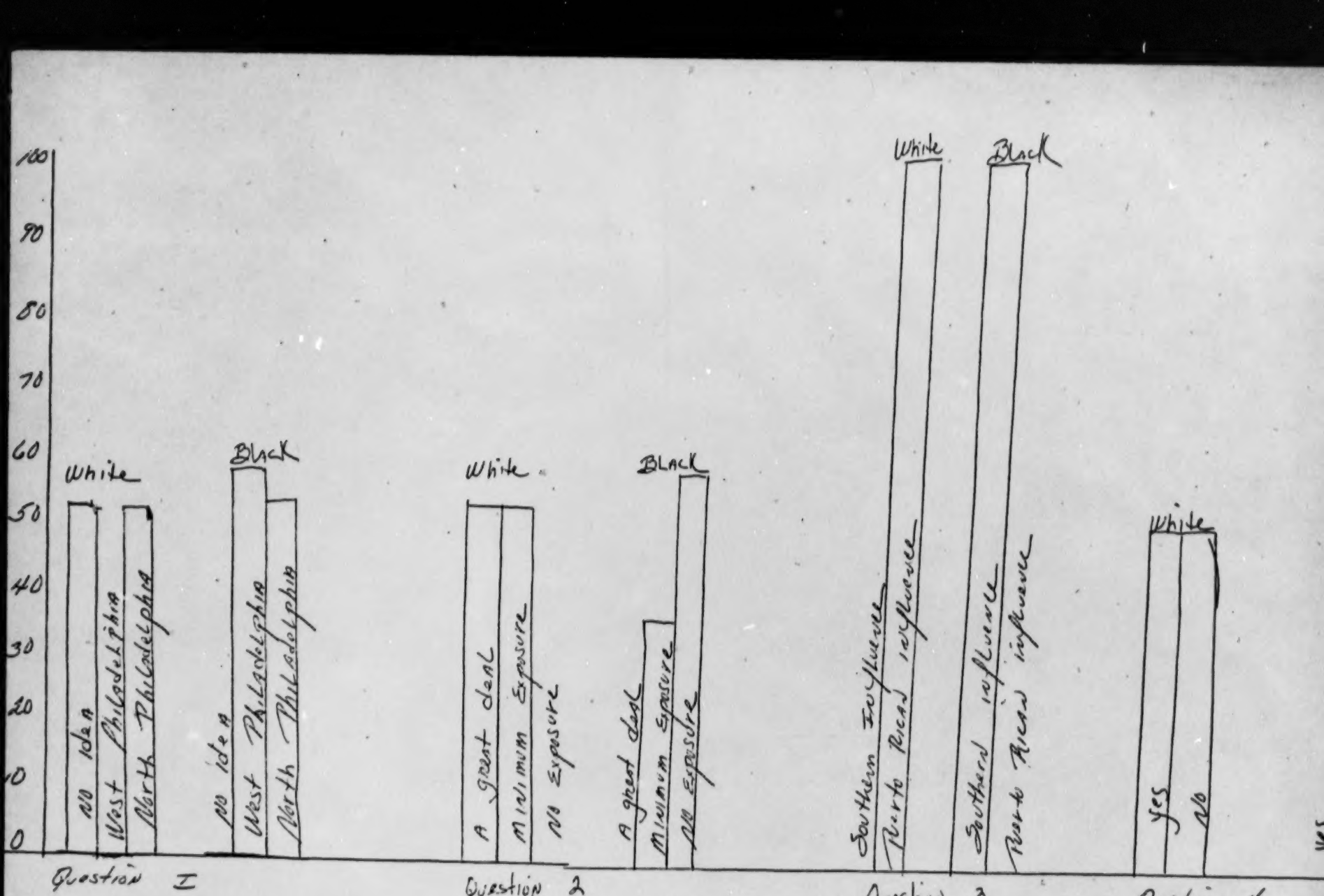
follows: two Whites had no idea where she was from, the other 2 Whiteinformants believed she was from North Philadelphia. 53% of the Blacks believed she was from West Philadelphia, while the other 47% said she was from North Philadelphia.

On question two regarding her exposure to White speech the following conclusions were reached: the two White informants said she was influenced a great deal by White speech, the other two Whites said there was minimum exposure. Of the Blacks 40% also believed there was minimum exposure, while the other 60% saw no exposure whatsoever.

In reference to her contact with the South or Puerto Ricans, all the Whites believed she had influence from Puerto Ricans. On the other hand, 36 Blacks believed she had traces of the South in her speech. One of the informants stated that generally Blacks do believe there are traces of the South in their dialect.

In answering question 4, contrary to expectation the Blacks believed unanimously that she was Black, that she could not possibly pass for White. From the number of Whites asked, 2 believed she was Black, and the other 2 said she was White.

In order to illustrate my point this chart should prove helpful:


100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
White
Black
White
Black
White
Black
White
Black
White
no idea
West Philadelphia
North Philadelphia
no idea
West Philadelphia
North Philadelphia
A great deal
Minimum exposure
No exposure
A great deal
Minimum exposure
No exposure
Southern influence
Puerto Rican influence
Southern influence
Puerto Rican influence
yes
no
Question 1
Question 2
Question 3
Question 4

After asking these questions, in hopes of not getting a biased view, I decided to counteract the issue. As opposed to going on the premise this time that Carla was Black, I decided to ask the following presuming the speaker was White:

1. Where in Philadelphia do you think this person was raised?
   no idea North Phila. West Phila.
2. How much Black speech has she been exposed to?
   a great deal a minimum none
3. Do you think she had contact with the South or Puerto Ricans?
4. Could she pass for Black speaking this way?
5. Do you think this person over the phone could pass for Black?

Twenty informants were interviewed, 18 being Black, again divided into 9 middle class and 9 lower class, and 2 Whites. The results showed that in regard to question one the 2 Whites had no idea where she was from, while 40% of the Blacks believed she was from West Philadelphia, and the other 60% said North Philadelphia.

Question two indicated that the Whites again isolated in their reply believed Carla had been exposed to a minimum of Black speech, while all the Blacks replied that she had been exposed to a great deal of Black speech.

In question three, the answers were more diverse. The two white informants said there was Puerto Rican influence in her speech, while 40% of the Blacks believed the same. The other 60% felt she had contact with the South.

Looking at question 4, as to whether or not she could pass for Black, puzzled many of the Black informants. Unanimously 100% said she could, but some asked the reasoning behind my question believing that indeed she was Black. The response of the two Whites in this case was that one said maybe she could pass for Black, while the other said no. And lastly, all agreed 100% that over the phone she could pass for Black.

In conclusion, the Whites knowing Carla was a White speaker shows their awareness of the influence of White speech. Yet, since Carla was thought to be Black by all the Black speakers, she has obviously assimilated enough Black English Vernacular in her speech to be accepted as a Black speaker.

The chart on the following page illustrate my point:

100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
no idea
West Philadelphia
North Philadelphia
Question 1
Black
no idea
West Philadelphia
North Philadelphia
White
Black
A great deal
Minimum
none
A great deal
Minimum
none
Question 2
White
Black
South
Puerto Rican
South
Puerto Rican
Question 3
White
yes
no
Black
yes
no
Question 4

VI Conclusion

In conclusion, these three children and the other white children scattered throughout a school which is 98% Black constitute an issue seldom discussed. The fact is when a few white students are in a school occupied by mostly Black students, they must assimilate to Blacks both culturally and linguistically in order to successfully survive. It would be folly to suggest, for instance that Black culture should not be emphasized in a school such as the one which has served my model. Statistically, it is wiser to fill the needs of 98% rather than 2%. Perhaps, it is precisely because of the aforementioned, that I have written this paper.

It can be said, therefore,(based upon my observations and statistics), that Carla, (and perhaps other White Students in a similar situation) has nearly assumed the identity of the Blacks who surround her. This is manifested, most obviously, in her speech patterns and manage to permeate many other aspects of her personality.

This conclusion may have raised some very valid sociological and psychological questions that need answering. Beyond the fact that Carla's problem may be neatly parallel to the plight of Blacks in the 50's, what Carla through her environment has done and continues to do, may perhaps constitute a prophetic view of the future. Since Blacks increasingly populate the urban environment, Whites will have

the opportunity to acquire many important characteristics of their culture.

Footnotes

[1]William Labov, "Some Features of the English of Black Americans," in Varieties of Present Day English, by R.W. Bailey, J.L. Robinson(New York: MacMillan and Co., 1973), p. 236.

[2]William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," in Studies in Social Interaction, by David Sudnow(ed.) (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 121.

[3]William Labov, P.Cohen, C. Robin, and John Lewis, A Study of the NNE of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City (Philadelphia: U.S. Regional Survey, 1968), p. 255.

[4]William Labov, Sociolinguistic Patterns(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972),p. 189.

[5]Walt Wolfram, A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech(Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969), p. 42.

[6]Wolfram, p. 47.

[7]Wolfram, p. 185.

[8]W. Labov, P.Cohen, C.Robin, and J. Lewis, p. 255.

[9]Sudnow(ed.) p. 121.

[10]In consultation with Dr. Labov, I found that he had played the tape to his family and came up with the following results: His wife Terry and son Simon believed Carla could be white with Puerto Rican influence. His son is in a situation similar to Carla's, but speaks very White. However, his daughter Joanna said that Carla was not White, that she was indeed a Black speaker.

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